

The Effect of Using Arabic Language for Teaching English as a Foreign Language at Elementary Stage Schools in Jordan

Ahmad Dmour

Dept. of English Language and Literature, Mu'tah University, P.O Box: 7, Mu'tah, Al Karak, Jordan

Abstract

This paper aims at investigating the effect of using Arabic language for teaching English as a Foreign Language in a Jordanian context at elementary school stages in Al-Karak Directorate of Education. English language teachers usually intend to focus on using English in their classes, but they come across a big problem which is the lack of communication between the teachers and their students as they have difficulties in comprehending what they think of as a difficult foreign language. The sample of the study consists of 30 participants. The researcher used random sampling to select the participants of the study. The researcher used a questionnaire survey and a test to elicit data from the participants. The findings of the research indicated that using Arabic language as a facilitating tool in English classes has affects negatively and positively teaching English as a foreign language with a classroom setting in a Jordanian context. This paper recommends further research be conducted to investigate relevant types of problems related to this study with different areas.

1. Introduction

The issue of the use of a native language to communicate with students in foreign classes has been a matter of controversy for decades. According to Kachru (1992) there are four non-native English speakers for each native English speaker, which is a proportion similar to that of teachers of English whether as a foreign or a second language. As many think that the best way to teach English language is using the mother tongue of the students. Nation (2003) and Schweers (1999) emphasize that the appropriate use of mother tongue in the classroom setting can be very beneficial. The key for the teacher seems to be using the mother tongue appropriately and avoiding the overuse which will make learners feel that they cannot comprehend the input of the foreign language until it is translated into their native language (Athinson, 1987).

English language, without a doubt, is considered a first worldly language, even in countries which do not use English as a first language. It is the common language used between all people from different areas in the world (Battle & Lewis 2002). In many countries, even Arab countries, they use English as a main language in class, which helps the students acquire this language as their mother tongue, especially if it is used in all times (Warschauer & Zohry, 2002). Brown (2000) and Schweers (1999) propose that starting the classroom with the first language provides a sense of security and validates the learner's academic experiences, allowing them to express themselves".

The number of people worldwide learning English is steadily increasing (Crystal 2012). Education in Jordan has enormously evolved in the past 60 years. It is categorized as one of the best educational systems in the world. This shows academic courses that are taught in English language in a classroom setting are considered as strong and tough in a way, and if they are taught and understood correctly, students will be evaluated as the best. English language courses in all academic institutions in Jordan, is what made education in Jordan so significant. This resulted in the rapid development in the educational system in Jordan (Nonan, 2003).

English in Jordan is an important language to be learned. It is becoming through time a language which is used in most areas in the country. The Ministry of Education with the agreement of the government that have made it compulsory at the age of six after the 1990s. Despite of the fact that Arabic language is the native tongue in Jordan, people think that English language is more widely used in Jordan. The country has become bilingual (Al Nagi & Hamdan, 2009). They believe that by learning English language, wide doors will be opened for them to non-speaking Arabic world, where they will have better opportunities for better life. Not mentioning that English language has spread thoroughly in every single field in the country; for example, in the media (especially social media like Facebook), business, education and technology (Al Musa & Smadi, 2013).

2. Literature Review

The issue of acquiring new language has raised opposing and supporting ideas. While some believe that the use of mother tongue language can be really helpful in learning new language. This is because they think that using a new language will facilitate and path the way for teachers and students in dealing with the new language. Whilst, others think that the first language will prevent students from learning new languages. Here, there are some of the researches that have been conducted throughout the years on this issue:

Rababah (2003) emphasized the importance of using the target language in language teaching. He demonstrates this to professionally characterize the status of EFL learning situation in Jordan. This indicates that teachers in Jordan use Arabic to teach difficult words and to explain English literature. Vocabulary items are still taught in

isolation, though the Communicative Language Teaching approach stresses the importance of teaching vocabulary items in context. The findings of this study pointed out that using the source language in the classroom setting is very beneficial.

However, Deller and Rinvoluci (2002) do not support the random use of the native language and warn the language teachers of the negative effects of its over-use in the EFL classroom. On the other hand, a positive contribution to English learning can be fulfilled through teaching English bilingually if L1 is used at appropriate times and for appropriate reasons (Hamer, 2001; Cameron, 2001; Nation, 2003; Tang, 2002; Sharma, 2006). In addition, Miles (2004) indicates that limited use of the native language can actually facilitate the learning of an L2, and does not hinder it. According to Hadley (2001) students' native language usually plays an important role in most popular English language teaching methods.

In their research on bilingualism, Hamers and Blanc (2000) studied how bilinguals carry out a large variety of cognitive tasks in the two languages. Bilingualism involves having a command of the linguistic system—the phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics — that constitute the essence of each language, but it also means being able to keep the languages separate cognitively when necessary, and strategies to search the memory store in one language in order to use the information in the other language. The usefulness of first language as a cognitive and a pedagogical tool that facilitates learning has been gaining significance for the last two decades. For instance, Swain and Lapkin (2000) maintain that to assist that no use be made of the L1 in carrying out tasks that are both linguistically and cognitively complex is to deny the use of an important cognitive tool. According to Hadley (2001) students' native language usually plays an important role in most popular English language teaching methods.

3. Statement of the Problem

In Jordan, English teachers find it so hard to depend on English language only in teaching to Arab students. This is due to most students do not really comprehend English language very (Rababah, 2000). Teachers of English as a foreign language find difficulties teaching English without referring to the mother tongue in some aspects. They also state that their students encounter many problems comprehending English as a foreign language with the use of mother tongue by their teachers in a classroom setting (Duff, 1990). This indicates that both learners and teacher learning of English as a foreign language is difficult to learn without using the mother tongue in the classroom setting (Rababah, 2000). Consequently, this paper aims at investigating the effect of using Arabic language for teaching English as a foreign language at elementary stage schools in Jordan

4. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- Q1. What is the effect of using Arabic language for teaching English as a foreign language at elementary school stage level in Jordan?
- Q2. Is the use of Arabic language considered the best direct method to teach English language in class?
- Q3. What are the best ways which the teacher can use in class to improve the students' skills in English as a foreign language?

5. Research Objectives

This research intends to:

- i. investigate the effect of using Arabic language for teaching English as a foreign language at elementary school stage level in Jordan.
- ii. examine the use of Arabic language considered the best direct method to teach English language in class.
- iii. Find out the best ways which the teacher can use in class to improve the students' skills in English as a foreign language.

6. Methodology

This quantitative and qualitative research used statistic methods to analyze the data. Varied research procedures have been conducted in order to highlight the problem from all sides. The researcher used interviews techniques to elicit data from different language learners and teachers. The sample of the study were selected randomly from Al Ghowayer Secondary Schools for Boys. The researcher used a questionnaires survey as another research technique to collect the data from the selected population. The sample consists of 30 participants from 9th Grade students at Al Ghowayer Secondary for Boys. This research used a mixture of research methods to validate the findings of the research.

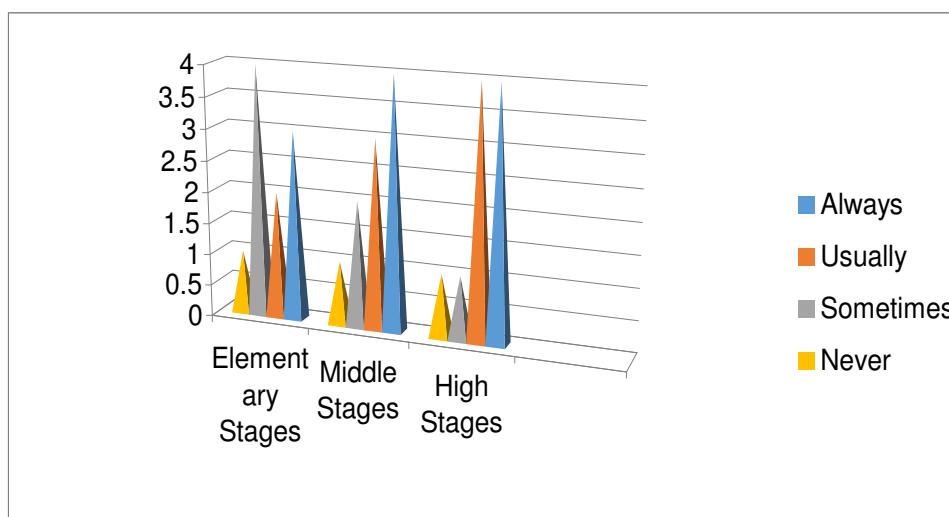
7. Findings and Discussions

Looking back at the teachers' answers in the questionnaires, it is noticed that there is a high dependence on from the teacher on using Arabic language when teaching English as a foreign language for elementary stages

students. In general, they have agreed that grammar should be taught in Arabic mainly, for they think that students can comprehend it in a much better way. While in the comprehension texts, vocabulary and general exercises, they stated using much Arabic is not appropriate. They attempted to focus in English for such exercises in which it can be understood easily, especially if related questions provided or extra activities relating to the subject.

The four English main skills are absolutely applied in their classes. Also, the findings stated that the teachers attempted to enhance their students in each and every skill by presenting available methods. For example, the results of the study pointed out that writing skill is considered the most difficult skill to students. They always find a difficulty in looking for the right vocabulary they want to use. That is why teachers request students to bring English-English-Arabic dictionaries. They think that they can improve the level of their students in English by memorizing as much vocabulary as possible. The main problems which teachers mentioned in the questionnaire they face in teaching English is their weak students who occupy a high percentage in class, and this forces the teachers to use Arabic in their teaching in order to help such students follow up with their classmates and peers. Solutions which teachers have proposed will be discussed in the end along with best methods which can be used in teaching a foreign language in class without the affect of the native language. Figure.1 below displays the percentages of the teachers' answers to the use of Arabic language in the classroom by language learners.

Figure (1): The Percentage of Using Arabic Language for Teaching English Language in the Classroom.



As shown in Figure (1) above, the researcher used two research methods to investigate this problem, a test and a questionnaire. First of all, two involved 9th Grade classes belonged to two different levels have been chosen to experiment the problem. Based on the displayed figure, teachers who use Arabic language for teaching English as a foreign language recorded the highest as highlighted in blue, teachers who usually use Arabic language for teaching English as a foreign language recorded the second highest percentage, but teachers who never use Arabic language for teaching EFL recorded the third in position, whilst teachers who stated they sometimes use Arabic language for teaching EFL came last in position. The percentage of teachers' use of Arabic language for teaching English as a foreign language included all the different schooling stages. As far as this study is concerned, elementary stage teachers recorded the highest percentage of using Arabic language for teaching EFL indicating a negative effect over the process of language teaching. Having stated the problems of using Arabic language for teaching English as a foreign language as both negative and positive, the findings state that the negative problems of the use of Arabic language in the classroom can be overcome based on the following proposed ideas:-

1. The teacher should set specific goals for each lesson in preparing for class, and always should expect the best from his/her students which will encourage them to do the best they can, at least in preparation. Positive and supportive environment is the first step in enhancement.
2. Teachers should distinguish differences between students, not only in their levels, but also in capabilities, motivations to learn English, their way of thinking, personalities and attitudes.
3. Working in pairs, in groups or even independently is certainly good for the students because sometimes they feel at ease when dealing with each other more than interacting with a teacher. There should be a

more students activity rather than teachers activity. This will help them in depending on themselves, assessing their abilities and creating a simple language of their own which they can use in class.

4. Teachers who correct students' errors should do it in an appropriate and encouraging way which includes time-wait and self-correction.
5. Using monolingual dictionary (English-English) in the beginning of each class; for at least five minutes to enrich students' vocabulary.
6. Students are guided to use all levels of thinking; to memorize, to recall, to apply, to create, to recognize, to repeat and to predict.
7. Practice and continuous practice is always a successful strategy. The more teachers help the students in developing and practicing their own skills, the better and the faster they can get.
8. Diversity in the teacher planning course can attract the students' attention to class, especially if practicality in presenting a lesson is included such as plays, acting, singing and data shows.
9. Listening exercises are so important. It can improve the student's ability in acquisition a new language, the accent they speak with and concentration. If educational audio cassettes are not available, you can always make them listen to a simple English song. The class will seem so much fun.
10. The writing skill can be improved by continuous practice through different strategies. In addition to the importance of using dictionaries, they should also realize how to use a word and put it in the right context. Students should begin with simple daily actions, and then move to a more difficult level. A strategy which I like using is drawing. A student can describe a story by drawing the events of the story in simple sketches and then express each picture in a simple sentence. If he or she finds a difficulty in remembering a certain word, they should write in Arabic and look up for it in the dictionary after finishing the writing.
11. Technology is an asset if available. Students will be encouraged to learn when the tools used are close to what they think is amusing.
12. Students and teachers should be aware that the goal of English class is not just for exams and grading. It should not be strict and abide by the rules. Students should be aware of the diversity of cultures between Arabic and English. Teachers should inform the students that the main goal of English class is to improve their skills in the use of a foreign language, the importance of it and it is the tool to get through a much wider, a more developed and better world.

9. Conclusion

The teaching of English as a foreign language in class has always been debated about. Whereas some believe that English language should be used only in class to improve the students' skills, others think that Arabic should be included for the main goal in teaching is the student, and the best methods possible should be used in conveying and illustrating English comprehension texts, grammar, exercises and speaking and writing skills. Regarding English as the first main wide-spread language in the world, still many people consider it as a difficult language to learn. This stereotype of thought has a negative impact on our students in schools in general. This can be avoided by following up certain methods mentioned in the research which can hopefully make English classes easy to teach and learn.

The issue which we should focus on is the student, for he/she is the recipient. We should set a main goal for every English class, which is the best way to teach this and how a teacher can convey this to my student. If the main goal is set, everything in class will turn good. But if a teacher enters a class, not knowing what to do, where to start from or how to teach, then be certain that you have come to a serious problem. Including Arabic in English classes, as I think, is not a mistake. It eases the atmosphere for students to learn and comprehend better. But we should not depend totally on Arabic language only. There should be a mix of both. We do not want to ignore the idea that the class is called an "English class" and the aim of it is to help students in acquiring it as much as possible. To sum up, employing Arabic as a facilitating tool in English classes has gained so much attention in schools. This paper has attempted to investigate the opinions, attitudes and solutions of this issue amongst teachers and students.

References

Al Nagi, E., & Hamdan, M. (2009). Computerization and e-Government implementation in Jordan: Challenges, obstacles and successes. *Government Information Quarterly*, 26(4), 577-583.

Chung, T. M., & Nation, P. (2003). Technical vocabulary in specialized texts. *Reading in a foreign language*, 15(2), 103-116.

Crystal, D. (2012). English as a global language. Cambridge University Press.

Cummins, J. (1992). Bilingualism and second language learning. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 13, 50-70.



Hamers, J. F., & Blanc, M. (2000). *Bilingualism and bilingualism*. Cambridge University Press.

JOHNSTONE, A. H., & SELEPENG, D. (2001). A language problem revisited. *Chemistry Education Research and Practice*, 2(1), 19-29.

Krashen, S. (1989). We acquire vocabulary and spelling by reading: Additional evidence for the input hypothesis. *The modern language journal*, 73(4), 440-464.

Krashen, S. D. (1981). Bilingual education and second language acquisition theory. *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework*, 51-79.

Lust, B. C. (2006). *Child language: Acquisition and growth*. Cambridge University Press.

Nunan, D. (2003). The Impact of English as a Global Language on Educational Policies and Practices in the Asia - Pacific Region*. *TESOL quarterly*, 37(4), 589-613.

Rababah, G. (2003). Communication and linguistic problems facing Arab learners of English. *Indian journal of applied linguistics*, 29(1), 127-142.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Rollnick, M., & Rutherford, M. (1993). The use of a conceptual change model and mixed language strategy for remediating misconceptions on air pressure .*International Journal of Science Education*, 15(4), 363-381.

Schweers Jr, W. (1999, April). Using L1 in the L2 classroom. In *English Teaching Forum* (Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 6-9).

Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (2000). Task-based second language learning: The uses of the first language. *Language Teaching Research*, 4(3), 251-274.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1980). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard university press.

Warschauer, M., Said, G. R. E., & Zohry, A. G. (2002). Language choice online: Globalization and identity in Egypt. *Journal of Computer - Mediated Communication*, 7(4), 0-0.